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ABSTRACT

This study presents findings from an ongoing study of urban childhood on public assistance. The study used interviews with aldermen, social workers, police, public housing and ghetto neighborhood residents, and medical personnel as well as the collection of field study data from local institutions and their representatives. The results appear in four vignettes or "ghettoscapes" that capture different but related aspects of collective poverty. The first vignette, "Artist and Pastor," is a stand-alone interview statement of the Reverend Jacob. In the second vignette, "White Boy's Exit," thoughts and feelings are used to create a word picture that describes the suicide death of a white youth in the emergency room. The third vignette, "Doctor Mike," is a stand-alone interview statement of a local doctor in the community. The fourth vignette, "Black Man Goes to Jail," exhibits a family struggle among an elderly mother, an adult daughter, and an adult son. The data indicate that enforced minimum personal and social control causes poor people to face losing both their heritage and the privilege to work their culture out little by little to their benefit. Poor people's systemic violent action directed against themselves and others is a sign that American society treats its poor in unjust ways. Included are 17 references. (JB)

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GETTING UP AT THE CRACK OF NOON:

CHILDHOOD ON PUBLIC ASSISTANCE

by

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INTRODUCTION

"Getting up at the crack of noon," was the police officers' informal signal that a new day was beginning in the ghetto. At mid-morning the city's police patrols changed from the late-night to the daytime shift. At noontime as the new shift drove through the projects, an officer would observe the increasing street activity, glance at his wrist watch, and remind partners: "The People get up at the crack of noon." Police slang for African Americans was, "The People," and for Appalachians, "Hillbillies." Ghetto residents--including many children--awoke around noontime, due to a variety of nighttime plans, disturbances, legal and illegal events, and police raids.

From my viewpoint getting up at the crack of noon also indicates that public policy--despite high-minded civil rights legislation--remains unaware of or unconcerned with the ghetto person's basic human rights. On the one hand, inner city children's nighttime events include life-threatening attacks and homelessness. Regular chaos and abuse cause these children to oversleep and miss school bus stops, sleep in their desks, and go without eating. They do not remember where they slept last or where they last saw their parents, guardians, or younger siblings. On the other hand, nighttime allows ghetto people some control of their personal lives--despite a high technology police force and increasingly intrusive government policy. Wake up time in the ghetto is personal business.

What is the relationship between childhood on public assistance and urban educational programs? Public school may be the only refuge and hope for ghetto children. This institution could protect them from a life-style that accommodates violent gangs, drive-by shooting, childhood rape, and drug abuse. Education could help America's poor children achieve self-worth, knowledge, skill, and eventually escape from collective poverty. Given the tragic circumstances of ghetto life, educators should feel that a culture-sensitive response is urgently needed. At the level of the individual, I believe that most urban educators are concerned. Not so at the institutional level.

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Educational policies (national standards or state proficiency testing) and classroom activities are out of step with the ghetto children's world and with educational ideals (Bruckerhoff, 1988). School reforms that attempt to upgrade and update the curriculum (new math standards and multi-cultural education) may be seen as state impositions that depersonalize relations between ghetto children and destroy, interfere with, or exacerbate their local culture (Bruckerhoff and Popkewitz, 1991). The gap is vast between the public school and ghetto society and grows greater still when educational reform adopts corporate interests (cooperative learning) and national emergencies (math, science, and technology) as curriculum mandates.

My field research indicates that--despite benevolent intentions--the urban public school perpetuates negative aspects of ghetto life. Sitting in classrooms hour after hour, I get terribly bored and frustrated. Piecemeal delivery, teach-to-the-test curriculum, standard teaching practices, faddism, constant harping. Sometimes while at school I feel angry and hostile. I feel like a student. I believe what public schools do to ghetto children is wrong.

This article is about ghetto life-style. The word, ghetto, means a quarter of a city in which members of a minority racial or cultural group live especially because of social, legal, or economic pressure. Public housing, poverty stricken areas, and projects are popular, alternate terms, but do not have the same historical sense as ghetto. Ghetto originally meant an enforced residence area for Jews segregated from society by eleventh century Muslims, later by Christians. During World War II the Nazis used ghettos as holding areas for Jews before extermination. Currently, U.S. civil rights laws, which intend to dissipate American ghettos populated by Black and immigrant or minority groups, fail because of similar social prejudices that established the earliest ghettos.

I use real life stories to raise questions about educational policy and practice applied to ghetto children who live in collective poverty. The expression, collective poverty, refers to historical (rather than temporary) insufficiency to obtain basic needs. To ward off collective poverty in the United States, public assistance programs offer relief to poor people. However, statistical data show that in the past decade child poverty increased and remains at high levels, births to unmarried teenagers increased, violent deaths of teenagers increased, and indicators of child well-being show little or no progress (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 1991 and Cowley, 1991). Twenty-five percent of all American children live in poverty. Life conditions for poor Black and Hispanic children are the worst (Wilson, 1987).

In these ghetto stories, power that emanates from elemental physical and psychological control is the central theme. However, prevailing social pressures against ghetto society mean that persons on public assistance have control only of their most basic human functions--when to sleep, procreate, and excrete. At present, the ghetto children's subculture shows the lethal repercussions of this minimum control (Norland 1992).

RESEARCH METHOD

This report is a small part of my ongoing investigation of childhood on public assistance. The research transpires in a mid-western city, whose population is approximately 525,000 people. According to social service data files, nearly 10 percent (7,000) of this city's school children live in public housing apartments. Annually, hundreds more pass through the city's projects on their way to other ghetto areas, including suburban neighborhoods. The official transience rate was approximately 25 percent.

To learn about the ghetto life-style thus far, I interviewed aldermen, social workers, police, public housing and ghetto neighborhood residents, and medical personnel. I also collected field study data from the local public school district's teachers, administrators, and counselors. I lived in the vicinity for several years, overlapping the study.

The results appear in four "gettoscapes" that capture different but related aspects of collective poverty. (The larger study has documentation on men and women from different races, ethnic groups, and occupations.) "Artist and Pastor" and "Dr. Mike" are stand-alone interview statements. In "White Boy's Exit" I use my thoughts and feelings to create a word picture. "Black Man Goes to Jail" exhibits a family struggle between an elderly mother, daughter, and son. The people are real; their names are fictitious. The intention in each story is to impart to the reader a sense of being in the real situation and knowing as much as possible about its physical and social circumstances (Chilcott 1992, 35).

An urge to know about urban poverty's effects on children, evolving field situations, and primary hunter instincts influenced where I went, what I observed, questions posed, and who to interview. Also, I believe the actual language that city people used during the conversations and interviews will have a better effect on readers than a researcher's detached descriptions. For every occasion, I wrote what people said immediately on yellow notepaper--there was no tape recorder. Each vignette presents a key person's situation or perspective. However, real conversations are seldom logical constructions (Kaplan 1964, 8), so I edited and rearranged the record cautiously to make all statements coherent. This ethnography is consistent with my previous work (Bruckerhoff, 1991) and follows methodological guidelines from George Homans (1950), E. E. LeMasters (1975), and Studs Terkel (1974 and 1980).

Recently, some education officials have told me that we know enough about urban poverty. They believe it is now time to describe programs that work. I agree that practitioners need descriptions of good programs, but solutions are in abundant, growing supply (Comer, 1988; Knapp and Schields, 1991; Slavin, 1987). I disagree with the view that now we know enough about ghettos and urban children. Most teachers, professors, policy analysts, and legislators do not know ghetto life because they do not live there and are terrified to enter. Reports of inner city life-styles do not capture local culture accurately and comprehensively. Many researchers rely on statistical designs. Cavalier ethnographers routinely use political, ideological, or academic bias to interpret their informants' attitudes and behaviors.

The research standpoint in this study is called natural history and its ultimate purpose is to develop what Glaser and Strause (1967) have called grounded theory. I have emphasized collecting descriptive details about an evolving social situation, while interfering as little as possible with its natural course of events. Local people everywhere have their own special kind of wisdom and that is the truth I seek.

GHETTOSCAPES

Artist and Pastor

The Reverend Jacob is 68 years old and lives in a run-down three story frame house on the east side of town, deep in a ghetto area. He was born in the rural south and moved "up north" when he turned seventeen. His formal education stopped at third grade. I first met him at an art exhibit two days previously. Reverend Jacob is tall, wide-framed, and slightly hunched. His dark black face is handsome. He has a full, silver beard and baldish head. His hands are strong and extra large.

On time for the interview, I walked to the front door. Mixed media sculptures fill the front porch and yard. Several Black men stood together across the street, sharing a liquor bottle. Cars fill the street's parking spaces, so I parked in the Wendy's Restaurant lot nearby.

I knocked on the door and immediately a deep, menacing, male voice demanded, "Who dare?" I did not recognize this voice. "Who dare?" it said even louder. I said, "It's Charles Bruckerhoff." "Praise the Lord. Come in," said a soft voice that I recognized as Reverend Jacob's. He had two greetings, just in case there was an intruder. From the stairs he said, "I'm not ready yet. Will you wait, please?" I said, "Certainly. I'll have a look around."

Reverend Jacob's art fills the house. Paintings and sculptures cover every available wall surface and crowd the floors. Ceilings, also. I studied an untitled and still unfinished 24" X 36" acrylic painting of three Black women--grandmother, mother, and daughter--seated at a table, and facing the viewer. On the table are a plate with food scraps, an empty baby bottle, and a crawling baby--barely discernible. Characteristic of Reverend Jacob's art, the figures are in bold outline and colorful, with primitive, powerful facial expressions. The women look hungry and desperate.

In the front room is a mixed media sculpture titled,"Black Cat Out of a White Bag"--a white bowling bag with its side ripped open and black bowling ball stopped almost fully out. Later, Reverend Jacob explained that this sculpture symbolizes the Black person's usual choice in white-dominated society. Opposite the front door is "Home Alone," a 24" X 36" acrylic of a seated nude Black woman, who stares abandonment at the viewer. In the basement is "Annie Goin' to Get It," a 24" X 36" acrylic painting of a Black prostitute, naked to the waist, tugging her small child out of a tavern--a beer mug clutched in her right hand catches her dripping breast milk. The numerous other paintings and sculptures exhibit inter and intra-racial strife,

drug and alcohol abuse, family and street violence, desperation and hopelessness--from a ghetto dwelling Black person's viewpoint.

The Reverend Jacob's slow climb down the creaking stairs recalled my purpose. I returned to the living room. He said again, "Praise the Lord." I said, "I'm not very religious." He said, "It doesn't matter. You can still say, 'Praise the Lord.'" Every time he said this, he meant it. He shook my hand and led me to the kitchen. We sat at his long makeshift table. I asked him to talk about his people.

Reverend Jacob

Let's you and I get one thing straight. Let's deal with Blacks, period.

(I said, "That would be fine with me.")

I think the word, "poor," is like a mark. These poor people, who live in the projects, they become that way. They do this because they want to go along with the welfare program.

Everybody in the projects seems to be of one mind. Some don't try to do anything different. But look, I can be what even I am (artist and minister), surely more of them can. Nobody here is looking for anything special--which is sad--so they go wherever they go and it is always from worse to worse. I was a rich man in the ghetto. I <u>was</u> rich. I had my own moving business and made lots of money. As a young man, also, I was a very rough character--sex habits, drugs, drinking. You name it. I had it.

We Black people think that the white people have the answer. We figure whatever the white man does, that's OK. We've been brain washed. My people are just like a dog. You have it on a chain for a long time and it won't go anyplace. That's what following white people's ways has done to us. This is the way we think: You see the Master come through the door, then it is OK for you to go through, too. Anything a Black man did was not because of another Black, but because of a white. White people have dominated Black people. We have so much hate even in our children--hate of the whites.

Also, let's go to this thought. When I was a boy, I was a negro. I want now to move ahead about another twenty years later. They told me then on my application that I had to write that I was colored, or colored boy. Then, we go another thirty years ahead, then all of a sudden it changes again to Black. Fifty years ago when he was born he was black when he was a negro. Then, the Blacks pick it up and call it an Afro-American. Is that an excuse to accuse others? There is no excuse for stupidity when knowledge is flowing in the air.

(A small neighborhood boy silently enters the kitchen and Reverend Jacob tells him to get his food from the refrigerator and leave.)

We are very careless about how we are conducting our lives. That little boy from the ghetto is wasting his life away. Even when he gets to adulthood,

he will still be a child. The adult is not going to be there. There is nothing there. Some knowledge comes with age, but that is not happening to the inner city Black people. The ones who have dominated inner city politics are not adults.

To do something for himself, to reach out, a Black person figures he can never be successful as a doctor or lawyer. So, the Black ghetto child wants to be like the big stars. Black children will say, I don't care if it is a big pimp going around town. I want to be like that Black man--that pimp. However, the pimp doesn't tell this Black child what to do for himself. When a Black child is born, we Black people don't think about the consequences. I don't agree with that. An awakening has to come from the Black parents. And from the neighborhood. Somebody has to speak about what can happen to this child.

The Black person's mind is pretty well disturbed because of the poor leadership of our own people. You go into these Black neighborhoods and who are the real leaders? The drug dealers and pimps. What do they show these kids? Get a new car. That's it. The Black children just look at the person with a big name. They don't see anything else. They are hurt by that. What do they do? These kids go for drugs and loud music. Take the music I can get on the car radio. I can turn it up loud. If I was mentally retarded and would drive through a suburb, the police would pick me up and take the radio away. So, I take it to the ghettos. There is nobody here. The respect is gone. We don't have self-respect anymore. Or, if <u>you</u> go way out in an expensive suburb and double park, they will arrest you. We don't do that here. We have this terrible thing growing in our neighborhoods--no self-respect. This is what we are about. What you see is what it is, nothing else. There is no mystery.

We need the kind of leaders that can come through and relieve us. Right now we seem to think that white people have the answer. We need somebody to elevate our people's mind. The Blacks never got out of the ghettos. Sure, Martin Luther King helped us get ahead. His marching did this. But, after we got all the things we wanted, like riding in front of the bus--and these things were important, they were very important--we got all we wanted, but we lost what we had. We wanted so many things and most of them were necessary, long overdue. But we thought that a better job, big pay--such <u>things</u>--were necessary. So many good things can spoil a person. I would not say that riding in front of the bus is bad, but prosperity has hurt us. We had more hope and faith before. We have lost so much in the process of time. Can we ever get it back? Do we want it back?

Another thing is this. The NAACP won their school desegregation cases state-after-state. Then, we did not have the proper books, etc. What did the NAACP decide? Send these Black children along with the other kids. The white kids, of course. We always want to be like the white kids. The pop, the fast food, etc. You show me one TV program that is good for Black people. We have hurt our people.

The NAACP wanted the Black ghetto children to get what those white children get. No. It doesn't work that way. There are expressions for both

kinds of people who live in the ghettos: whites and Blacks. They call them poor white trash and poor Black trash. There is one word, really, and it is poor. Because of these court decisions, the two classes came together. But the ones with the money moved out to the suburbs--both Black and white people. Living in the ghetto is not what these children call a successful person. It is success only if they can get a high class, high paying job.

We could have protested against the busing and stopped it before they did all these terrible things to our children. Now the Black children get up early in the morning. Forty kids get on a bus one at a time and are driven to west 140th street. We neglected to protest. This was an injustice to our own children. They thought this was the greatest movement. These Blacks who pressed for busing believed that they could sit with the whites and be somebody. This is their motto: learn the Black children the white man's ways. So, the Black children play with little white child and think the white child's way is the way life should be. They can't see, though, because they are blinded by the deceitfulness of their neighborhood. It's all owned by whites.

If you and I go through the projects now, what do we see? We see a football or a basketball. Black children forget about the Black doctors, lawyers, and other workers. They only see all these Black stars and heros. You can't tell that little Black boy that he can't be a basketball star. He will let education pass him by for an impossible chance to be a basketball star. The ghetto children can't see anything but that football, basketball, and boxing glove. You have to remember that the Black ghetto child is not seeing anything but what is public. His mind is so poor.

When anything is put on the black ghetto youth, he falls back on the expression: "I'm Black." That's a way out. He'll cry his way to glory. We have used this excuse. Every Black American must think this is why he is doing this. He thinks he is right. Look at our Black politicians and all the bigger Black men. They have all used this as an excuse to get ahead. They must have said: Maybe I don't want to live with my people. Maybe I want to be a "Black Cat Coming Out of a White Bag" (reference to his sculpture by this title). Maybe I am not satisfied that God made me Black.

When we got out of slavery, we were glorious. We celebrated. God delivered us out of slavery. What happened to that good feeling about ourselves? We didn't have football then. Or basketball. Or boxing. I remember the days of my childhood when all those great Black people were in our big Black church. There was not one failure. There was one teacher in school for all grades from 1 - 12. She would use upper grade students to teach lower grade students. There were no F's in there. If somebody made a C it was rare. She was a Black woman. These days it is an insult to me to read that the Black teacher was not qualified in the past. Our Black schools are not Black schools anymore. We have lost all responsibility for each other.

What about that other Black man who is climbing up to the sky? I want to educate my people some way or another. We are a passionate people. We are emotional. We like to feel good, but the realities of living pass us by. Our children are neglected. We don't have enough social workers, teachers, we

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just don't have them. We don't have enough educated Black preachers to work in the neighborhoods. How could you teach this in the school? The white teacher doesn't know how to reprimand Black children. And yet there are hundreds of white teachers who don't want a job outside of the inner city because they can serve best there. They have dedicated themselves to doing so. You could not say what I am saying there. I can talk this way, though.

At my church I really need other Black teachers to work with these children. We need something down to earth, something grass roots for our people. We need a strong voice other than myself. A voice that will reach my people. We need to get away from the crutch and excuse. Let's get away from me!

Nobody has ever kicked us in the butt--nobody from our own people--to come forth and take a stand for what God made us as a people. We could contribute to whatever nation it was. But this work would have to come from within the inner city Black people.

Right now, though, whatever the Black child is doing, he can't think any other way. His mind is wasted. Slavery didn't have anything to do with this.

I hope that somewhere in America there is a Black child who can say: I am not ashamed of what I am because of my hair, my skin color, and so forth.

White Boy's Exit

When I ride with the police, I am secondary to anything that happens and that is as it should be. We go through the car's usual city street route and wherever else the radio dispatcher sends us. I knew that a time would come when the police night beat would take me to a horrid reality.

It happened so quickly and so naturally one cold November night that I felt like a sleep walker in a nightmare. The two officers and I had just finished eating dinner at a Chinese restaurant. The driver pulled into the hospital parking lot, so that we could use its rest room. Because I usually sit in the back seat, where the doors are locked from the outside, one of the officers has to open the door for me. So, I'm the last one to walk into the Emergency Room (ER) entrance. One officer is telling the ER physician--who is sitting with his legs across the end of a gurney--that he should tell me about life in the ghetto, that I have been asking the same question all night and that, as a physician, he has an important story to tell. The officer turns to me as I walk in and says: "Here, ask Dr. Mike your questions. He has some answers for you."

I look around for a seat and notice a stool behind me that is propping open the door. At first I try to move it, but then realize that the large ER door will swing shut if I do and sit on it. This puts me at an awkward distance from Dr. Mike, but he seems unaffected and stretches out his un-gloved right hand and we shake hands. "What would you like to know?" he asks. I say that I would appreciate whatever he could give me regarding his opinion as an ER physician about childhood in the ghetto. He says: "You will find out why in a minute." As he spoke I wrote in my notebook, but looked up

at pauses and noticed that there were several other people in the room. They were standing against the walls near a piece of equipment or in the middle of some space, holding a wrapped piece of equipment. They were all looking out the ER door immediately behind me. They were dressed in hospital green and had plain, drawn faces, slightly upturned, statuesque.

Dr. Mike continued: "This is what I believe should be done for these children."

Then, in a calm, serious voice someone else said: "Here it comes." I heard the siren sound and saw a flashing red light. The ambulance turned onto the hospital street. I suddenly realized that I was sitting at the entrance to this emergency room where everyone else was waiting expectantly to operate on someone with a life-threatening injury. But Dr. Mike wasn't finished speaking. And he was more serious now. He said: "My views are not popular views , but I think they are important and could solve a lot of problems. This is what I think some of these kids need: a place to grow up away from their abusive and delinquent parents. They need to be taken out of that environment. There is a boy coming in here now, a 14 year old boy, with a self-inflicted gun shot wound to the head. I don't know if I can save him, but I will try."

The emergency crew was rolling the boy up the ramp. Dr. Mike put the rubber glove on his right hand and jumped off the gurney. I thanked him and the others and sped out of the room to watch from the hallway. The boy's head and shoulders were strapped in a large, orange, foam pad, specially designed for head injuries. He was stripped to the waist, bleeding, and trembling. His skin was white, like mine, but his nipples were a deep purple. He wore new high-top sneakers and grey nylon flight pants. On a quiet command, six people lifted him onto the operating table and just as quickly and gently removed the protective foam pad. Dr. Mike went to work immediately.

There were other people standing silently in the hallway. A minister leaned against one wall. A nurse stood immediately outside the operating room door carrying a medium-sized ice chest. Two orderlies leaned against the opposite wall. There were no family members or friends present.

The police officers returned from their trip to the rest room and motioned for me to follow. The hallway was silent, like a church. They looked into the ER as they walked by its open door. No one spoke as we drove away. At the stop sign I said: "God, that was awful. It was terrible. He is so young. He's just a boy. Why would life seem so hopeless to him?" I felt like I was going to be sick and wondered how they would get the door open in time. One of the officers asked if I saw the lady with the ice chest. I said, "Yea, what was that for?" He said, "Organs. If the boy dies they may be able to save his organs for someone else." No more was said.

Before the shift ended, I asked one of the officers to call Dr. Mike to find out what happened. I stood nearby, hopeful, uneasy. "Dr. Mike said they are waiting for the boy to expire. He will die soon," the officer relayed to me. I asked him to ask Dr. Mike if I could talk with him again the next time I was in town. He asked. "No problem, be glad to," the officer relayed.

Dr. Mike

I had planned to be at the hospital by 8:00 p.m., approximately one hour after Dr. Mike's 7:00 p.m. - 7:00 a.m. shift started. Extended day time meetings and bad weather delayed my arrival until 10:30 p.m. It was a cold winter night. Streets were slick from a recent snowstorm.

Inside the Emergency Room area, I went to the main desk, where several nurses were seated, and told them I had an appointment to see Dr. Mike. One of them went to an inner office. Dr. Mike came out immediately and took me to a small meeting room. He has lived in this city most of his life. He is white, 42 years old, and received his medical degree from a prestigious private university. He has been an Emergency Room physician in this inner city hospital for the past seven years. I asked him to talk about ghetto life, especially its effects on children.

The Doctor

We see a lot of neglect and abuse. Neglect is out of proportion to the poverty. It doesn't take money to care for kids. You can clean up with just a little soap--soap is cheap.

We see a fair amount of abuse related to the life situation of the family or support system. In some cases alcohol-related and in other cases drug-related. For example, we will have the mother in here with a child 3-5 years old for a sore throat. The child is treated in the treatment room. We go in there and the child is running around. The mother will yell and scream at the child and hit the child. So, that is what we see here. What happens to that same child at home?

We see children with physical abuse from parents. Recently we had 2 boys in here--5 and 8 years old--who were shot by their mother. One was shot in the head and the other in the chest. Both died. The mother was a psych patient. She had been here on other occasions with the children. We had concerns that there was neglect. What social services do is part of the problem. This town is so wonderful. The social workers' policy is this: Try to place the children from abusive homes with a relative. That sounds wonderful, doesn't it, but the people they place the children with will almost always give the children back to the parents. Social services placed this woman's children with her parents who had a gun in the house. She went there, found the gun in the house, and shot the two boys. She is suing the hospital now because she claims that she should have been hospitalized.

We see way too much sexual abuse of boys and girls, but more for the girls than the boys. It seems to be the boyfriend, uncle, or neighbor man--not some stranger. It usually is someone the kid knows.

One of this hospital's duties is to give medical clearance to kids who are on their way to a special home for abused children. These children will stay here temporarily. The kids who come here and were beat up will say: My

mom or dad did that to me. One problem we have that ticks off people here is in regard to the kid's hot line. We can dial ###-KIDS to report abuse and neglect to the social services people. That sounds great. However, social services people always try to place the children with others in the family. It is real frustrating dealing with them. They don't see the side we see--that the children are returned to the parents and the abuse continues.

Last week it ended up that I got into an argument with the social services people on the phone. Call it neglect or abuse, whatever you want, I said that particular home was no place for the kid to go. They tell me it is only one side of the story. But I have to believe this child! I tell them that I would rather believe the child saying that the father or mother is abusive than take a chance. It is the same story every time.

When we have a serious case in the operating room, like that boy's suicide (Dr. Mike didn't remember the suicide, but recalled the double homicide.), either it ends up being nobody present except the patient or a room full of people. That is the way it is. There are 20 people waiting and screaming, or no one.

Why does this happen? Maybe we should ask instead: Why do poor people have so many babies? Is it because the mothers get more money from welfare? Well, there is not enough money in welfare checks to raise kids. We know that. The folks I deal with tend to be Black and from the East side of town. I think it is an issue of control. We control everything for these people. Their food stamps, housing, medical care. We just can't control their reproduction. That gives them some room for control. We have routinely seen young children here who have mothers who are in their early twenties. They have already had 5 children.

Most nurses and physicians who work here find that appalling. When a patient comes in they will ask each other: How can they (poor people) take care of that many children? They will sometimes say to the patient: "Don't you use birth control?" These women will turn around to them, smile, and say: "No, I like having babies." We can't control that. That makes them feel good.

Not long ago at the local medical school we had a Black woman speak to high school students. Her name was Bobbie Avery, from Atlanta. She is real involved with issues of Black women, health, and children. She talked straight to the Black boys. She said: When are you going to take responsibility for your babies? We see women with children who have 3-4 different fathers. We never see the father. The woman tries to raise the children on her own. When she fails, she feels we are real mad at her. I don't have any children, but if I did, I would feel a bond and would want to be involved.

One thing about this issue of reproduction is real frightening to me. We see an unbelievably large number of sexually transmitted diseases here. In the Black community no one talks about Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). I don't know whether it is because it is associated with being gay, sex habits that you just don't discuss, or what. Maybe there is no talk about

AIDS because of the Bible. You are a bad person if you get AIDS, so don't talk about it. It is very frightening to me to see AIDS become a Black youth disease. These kids want to exert power and control over their body and this is the only control they have. They will come in here with AIDS.

I work here. I stay here because I love to talk to these kids about AIDS and the other things. I will never tell them not to have sex. I want to tell them what to do to control their body. Their point of reference for sexually transmitted diseases is gonorrhea. If they use that as their point of reference, they believe that if they feel that stinging sensation in three days, then they have the clap or something else. If they don't feel it, then they are happy that they have not caught a disease. They relate the clap to AIDS. But not many people take the time here to talk to them. The nurses get pissed. They will say: "All the niggers care about is fucking."

The residents here are just the same. Some of these residents are Black. Whatever their race is, they come down here from big name medical schools. I supervise these guys. For example, they will treat some person for high blood pressure. They will talk to this person for 20 minutes about blood pressure pills. That's ok. But they will go in to see some other person who has a case of gonorrhea and they only talk to that person about using a rubber. But they don't talk about AIDS! I will ask them every time: What did you talk about? They tell me about the rubbers. I say: We have so little time around here. You spend all this time with a patient about blood pressure pills that could save his life, and you said nothing to this other patient about AIDS! We are busy here, but we can work with people.

The sexual matter for teenagers is control and power to exert themselves--boys and the girls. Control. The only thing these people can control is their bodies. American society takes everything else away from them. When you control people, they don't want to take control of themselves. All they have left to control is bodily functions: when to eat, sleep, piss, shit, and so on. That's why they don't take responsibility for others. They will have kids and generations of families on poverty.

If someone actually gets out of the ghetto, they say: How in the world did he/she do that? There are forces in this country that would want poor people to remain poor. Especially Black poor people.

There is a lot that we as doctors could do. The problem is this: nowadays most new, young doctors are inundated with loans. The average loan for attending medical school may be $100,000. You have basically been living pretty poor all along as a graduate student. You don't have money as a student. When you get out, you want to make some money and pay off those loans.

New doctors don't want to work in the city, because there is no money to be made here. We have trouble keeping doctors here. Another issue is violence in the Emergency Room. What happens to us here? Verbal and physical abuse. And there is little that you can do to prevent or respond, once it has happened. Patients spit at us. They bite us. On the night shift we have the people out of the bars at 2:00 a.m. These things are all related to trauma.

Here is an example. Last summer a woman came in here holding a limp baby. The baby was not breathing. She was screaming: Help! Help! Nurses put the baby in the treatment room. I checked it. Signs indicated that the baby was already dead--no pulse, no breath, no heart beat. I was going to put a tube in the baby's mouth to resuscitate it. We have a device for that and it was supposed to be on the table in the treatment room. But it wasn't there. So, I immediately did mouth-to-mouth on the baby. A few minutes go by and there was no response from the baby. A nurse takes the mother out in the hall. When I come out the mother tells me that the baby has AIDS.

I was trying to take time out to tell the mother in the best way that I could that her baby was dead. I tell her that I am trying to help her. I say: if your baby has AIDS you have to tell me. The mother was a drug addict. But that isn't all. Her boyfriend was here. He starts getting hostile. I tell him to go to the waiting room to calm down. He says: I'm not moving. I ask him to leave. I tell him to go. I call security. He pushes me up to the wall and chokes me.

What could I do? I can say: That patient bit me and I had to restrain him. We don't get support from the hospital administration. Administrators believe the patients--always. I could file a police report on him. But what good would that do? He can claim that he was suffering from stress associated with the loss of his baby. He is upset about that. No judge would find him guilty. They can call us names, spit on us, and so on. If you touch them you go to jail for assault.

In the suburban hospitals it is still trauma, but it's not like it is at the inner city hospital and you can make more money than I do here. Most doctors make good money. The percentage who work in inner cities is pretty small, though. The numbers out there in the suburbs are greater. I could leave any time and bump ER physicians anywhere in this region. It would mean an increase in my hourly wage. I don't want to leave yet. You can call it altruism, but I plan to stay here for at least one or two more years. Altruism keeps those who do work here. They will live elsewhere, though. Not in the city. It's difficult. However, we have to have some means to attract doctors to poor people.

It is simple things that we need to help poor people, but these things are not our nation's priority. Preventative health care, for instance. Prenatal care. We see a woman here who will be 7-8 months pregnant and she has had no record of care. Our society doesn't want to put out money because we can't get measurable results. But every physician knows that it leads to more healthy people, if you use preventative health care.

Why don't we have some means for the government to forgive the doctor's loans? Also, I find it interesting how we have an impossible time getting the Black doctors to work here. Patients would feel so much more comfortable. We can't keep Black doctors here, though. They come for a day and are gone. I was talking about that last night with the Black resident who you just saw come in here.

What should we do for the schools? We should privatize all the schools. Make it an option. Make them boarding schools. The kids stay there all the time. How can we expect anything from ghetto children when prostitutes, cocaine, guns, liquor, etc. are everywhere on their streets? Boarding schools would work because other agencies would want to keep harm from these kids.

Someone should look at Catholic and public school parents. Parents who live right next door to one another will have very different treatment patterns for their children. We see kids here who go to Catholic school. They are clean and polite. I see many other parents who think of school as punishment. They do not see school as you and I did. For us it was enrichment and bettering our life chances. School was sometimes not what we wanted, but more often it was something we really wanted to do. For these ghetto kids they have no concept of that. For instance, a parent might interact with us on a kid's sprained ankle and immediately conclude that he can't go to school. These parents are always trying to get excuses not to go to school.

Black Man Goes to Jail

Late one Friday evening in November, the police squad car responded to a broadcast involving an argument between a mother and her 31 year old son. Someone had called police headquarters and accused the son of "selling stuff out of his mother's apartment." A veteran officer, who is 37 years old, drives the car and his partner is a 22 year old rookie. The rookie rarely spoke. Both men are white.

When we arrive at the address, located in the projects, the accused man's sister meets us. She is a stern-faced Black woman, 33 years old, and a little plump. She informs the officer in charge that she wants to join her woman friend and their children, who are waiting in a car. She escorts us into her mother's apartment, then states very loudly that her brother has taken their mother's washing machine, freezer, and pop corn popper and sold them.

The apartment is like a second-hand store pileup. Lamps, bottles, clothes, records, sheets, plates are mixed in boxes and stacked on the floor and chairs. Dust is everywhere. A cockroach crawls diagonally up the kitchen wall.

The man, who allegedly caused this problem, is alternately standing and sitting in a chair amid the awkwardly stacked articles. His skin is darker than his sister's. He is tall, well built, and wears a uniform for some type of blue-collar work. He and his sister shout claims and counter claims at one another. The brother's speech is so fast that it is hard to follow. He claims that he only took his mother's freezer out to get it fixed. The electrical plug was broken. The police officer asks him if he got a receipt. He responds that he does not have a receipt, because he forgot to get one.

Next, the police officer next asks the mother if the son lives there. She said, "Yes." Immediately, the daughter says, "Yes he does, when it is to his advantage to do so. And he has a key to let himself in and that is how he

manages to steal the stuff and sell it."

"Do you want your son to continue living here with you?" the police officer asks the mother?

The mother is 55 years old, overweight, and handicapped with an injured hip. She leans on a wooden cane. The mother starts to cry. She looks around apparently considering the consequences of different answers to the question regarding her son's staying with her. The police officer asks her again, "Do you want your son to continue living here with you?"

"Mamma, don't let him stay here," says the daughter. "Don't you tell Mamma what to say." says the son. The siblings begin to shout at one another again. "Let Mamma make up her own mind," says the son. "Sure," says the daughter, "So's you can sell off all the rest of this stuff. I'm getting out of here. You all do what you want. This is not for me, selling off all Mama's stuff for a lousy drug habit." The daughter walks outside.

The mother does not give an answer. The police officer turns to the son and asks, "Do you have a key to this apartment?" "Yes," the son responds. "Then, give it to your mother," continues the officer. That way she can lock the door. You can knock on the door from now on and if your mother wants to let you in, she can. If not, then she can refuse to open the door."

The mother has said nothing. The police officer takes the son aside and gets him to promise that he will stay for the weekend, but by Monday have ironed out this difference or have another place to stay. The son tells the police officer that he has just gotten a job, that it is cold out, and he has no other place to sleep, except here with his mother. "You can knock on that door, can't you?" asks the officer. "Yea," the son says.

Next, the officer explains this solution to the mother and she nods affirmatively. The officer gets the apartment key from the son and gives it to the mother, cautioning her that she is to keep the key and not let her son in, if he does not follow the rules of the house. The mother continues to nod affirmatively. Everyone leaves, except the son, who sits on a living room chair.

The daughter catches up to the police officers at the squad car. She says angrily, "I can't understand why you let my brother go like that. There is a warrant out for his arrest. Why didn't you arrest him?"

"What?" asked the officer. "Repeat that."

The daughter continues. "He stole his brother's gun and pawned it. There is a warrant out for his arrest on that charge. He has a twin brother who looks just like him. James and John are their names. James is always trying to mix them up to his advantage."

"Let's check it out," the veteran officer tells the rookie. Back inside the apartment, the officer in charge asks the son to identify himself fully--name, social security number, and drivers license. "Why?" asks the son. "I

didn't do anything." "There is a report of a warrant out for your arrest," says the officer. "No. That can't be true," the son says. "We will check it out," the officer replies. The son provides the personal identification and the rookie uses his portable radio to check records at police headquarters. There is a five minute wait.

Then, the radio dispatcher announces: "Affirmative on that warrant. There is failure to pay a traffic fine. Something about running his car through a gas station. The fine is $90.00." The Black man looks very surprised. "Oh no," he said. "I forgot about that. That was last year. Oh no, that's it. I didn't have the ninety dollars, so the judge gave me time to earn the money and pay off the fine. I forgot all about that."

The officer says, "James, I have to take you in." The veteran officer frisks the man, while the rookie inspects the man's coat for weapons. When the body search is finished, the veteran officer says, "You seem like you are going to behave, so I'm not going to put the cuffs on. OK?"

James told me the remainder of his story while we rode to jail together in the squad car's back seat. He is an articulate and pleasant man. He will go to jail because his sister reported that there was a warrant out for his arrest on gun theft. If he can make a personal bond, he can get out of jail this Friday night. If not, he will remain in jail until Monday.

Before leaving his mother's apartment, James asked the officer if there was a bus ticket in his wallet. There was one ticket, but no money. I last saw James at the jail, where I watched the police finger print him, remove his coat and shoe laces, and escort him to his cell. It was 10:30 p.m.

James

I started doing crack when I was twenty-nine years old. Now, I'm 31 years old. It was due to peer pressure. I have a job as an automotive mechanic. I got the job 5 days ago and this is pay day--today. I have a BS degree in technical engineering, a four year college degree that I got from a school in Indiana. I was in the navy and used the GI Bill to pay for it.

On that gun theft, I was short on cash and asked my brother if he could pawn one of his guns. He has several guns in his house. I needed some money. My brother said, yes, but the pawn ticket was in his name, so I didn't have any evidence of the pawn. Then, he and my sister concocted this story about my stealing the gun. It's all a lie.

I have to be at work at mid night.

DISCUSSION

The Reverend Jacob does not hate white people, but his art shows that he knows what has been done to his people by white people and by Black people who hate whites. He is searching for ways to rescue ghetto Black children from almost certain cultural, social, and physical destruction. He believes that American public policy fosters Black people's self-loathing, particularly among the poor. He sees beauty and possibility where others see ugliness and necessary cultural annihilation.

On a cold November night a fourteen year old white boy shot himself in the head and died alone. A hospital emergency crew monitored his slow, but certain expiration. His vital organs would sustain another person's life, but he had judged his life was not worth living. I do not know why, but I believe answers lie in the urban children's social context--a situation for which the adults have total responsibility. Dr. Mike forgot the white boy's suicide, but remembered the mother who shot to death her 5 and 8 year old children. He is a constant witness to urban tragedy, so I suspect that memory loss helps him cope. However, he will not last forever and there are not many doctors who would take his place. Dr. Mike knows that our society can diminish the horrors that visit his hospital--if only definitive steps are taken now.

Why did the police arrest and incarcerate the Black man? I have watched the police settle many ghetto family squabbles. This one was typical. Men like James will try and fail, try and fail--never winning and always taking two steps backward for every step forward. The Reverend Jacob said that poor people--whites and Blacks--have been forced to surrender their most basic human rights to "other class" institutions and values. Dr. Mike said that poor people refuse to study advantaged people's ways. Do poor people know and value other things and have different ways of knowing? One thing these ghettoscapes make clear is that enforced minimum personal and social control mean that poor people daily face losing both their heritage and the privilege to work their culture out little by little--to their benefit. No other group can do this for them. Public policy actually may be destroying their culture. Poor people's systemic violent action directed against themselves and others is a sign that American society treats its poor in terribly unjust ways.

The relationship between childhood on public assistance and public schools is no relation, apparently, except one that is defined by and for public policy. I wonder about physicians, lawyers, accountants, teachers, bankers, and others whose lives are reasonably good. My life. And I wonder: if physicians can organize against nuclear proliferation and musicians for farm aid, foreign aid, etc., why don't educators organize against abusive and violent childhood? Why don't educators organize against institutions and public policies that destroy or do not respect local culture? Is this the schoolteacher's real postmodern role?

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